CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FIFTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 31 May 2001, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Camilo Reyes Rodríguez (Colombia)

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The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I call to order the 875th plenary session of the Conference on Disarmament. There is no speaker on the list for this morning's plenary. I would like, however, to make an initial statement, as Colombia is now taking over the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished ambassadors, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen: this is the first time that it has fallen to my country to preside over the Conference on Disarmament. May I first of all reiterate Colombia's deep commitment to the Conference - a forum which, over the years, has demonstrated its invaluable relevance, thanks to the negotiation and conclusion of some of the most important international instruments in the field of disarmament. Multilateralism has always held pride of place in Colombia's foreign policy, which is why my country has actively participated in the latest arms control and disarmament negotiations. Among these I would like to highlight the Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials, adopted in the framework of the Organization of American States, the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines and the preparatory process for the NPT Review Conference.

Special mention should also be made of our commitment to the issue of small arms. As you will recall, in 1988, Colombia submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-third session resolution 43/751, the first to be adopted by the United Nations on the issue of the illicit traffic in arms. Subsequently, Colombia submitted to the General Assembly an initiative to convene an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects and the proposal was adopted by resolution 43/36 H of 6 December 1991. Seven years later, with the adoption of resolution 53/77 E, the General Assembly decided to hold this conference during the course of the current year, bearing in mind the views of Member States and the recommendations of the group of governmental experts on small arms, as stated in the Secretary-General's report on the subject.

For the last two years and more I have witnessed the patience, creativity and diligence with which my predecessors have sought a solution to the current stalemate in the Conference and I would therefore like today to pay special tribute to the efforts of Ambassadors Westdal, Vega and Hu, who have presided over the Conference this year, and to all other participants in this long and laborious process, who have worked on defining elements which could help provide a formula for future agreement on a programme of work.

The Ambassador of China, my immediate predecessor in this honourable but increasingly difficult task, when summing up the results of the consultations that had been conducted during his mandate, recommended to me a line of action with which I fully concur and which will therefore determine the direction that I will follow in my own endeavours, as, with your cooperation, I strive to maintain the pre-eminence of the Conference of Disarmament as the sole international negotiating forum in the field of arms control and disarmament.

It is the common understanding of all members of the Conference that the proposal submitted by Ambassador Amorim, which is to be found in document CD/1624, is a valuable asset for the Conference and constitutes a basis for further intensified consultations and for the continued exploration of possible avenues to agreement on a programme of work. Bearing in

(The President)

mind what I have just said and that it is also our common understanding that the primary obligation of the Conference is to agree on a programme of work, I will focus most of my consultations on exploring variations on the Amorim proposal which might lead to consensus.

In his conclusions, Ambassador Hu introduced the idea that the Conference is in a "waiting period", in view of the complex international situation and the deterioration of the security environment. Yet a "waiting period" does not necessarily entail paralysis or total inactivity. A waiting period may and should mean that, while awaiting a change in international circumstances which will make possible progress in the conference's substantive activities, we should continue to seek agreement on a programme of work and also forge ahead with work on those issues which have general support among members of the Conference. This would mean that, without diminishing our interest in reaching an agreement on the programme of work, the Conference on Disarmament would be able to reassert itself through the efficient use of the framework which it provides for discussion and negotiation.

I have initiated my consultations in order to determine precisely where we stand at the moment and in the hope that I may be able to outline alternative solutions which might achieve consensus in the Conference. When I conclude my first round of consultations tomorrow afternoon, I will be able to assess the prospects of submitting proposals to the Conference for its decision and I will keep you duly informed of progress.

Lastly, I would like to welcome the presence among us today of Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the Conference, and Mr. Enrique Román Morey, Assistant Secretary-General, on whose valuable cooperation and constant advice I will now be able to rely in undertaking my tasks.

Would any delegation now wish take the floor? The distinguished representative of Belarus has the floor.

Mr. MALEVICH (Belarus) (translated from Russian): Mr. President, first of all I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the important post of President of the Conference on Disarmament and to express our confidence that your experience and effective leadership will create the necessary conditions for productive work. Allow me to assure you, Mr. President, that the delegation of Belarus will give you every possible support in your endeavours and to wish you every success.

The Republic of Belarus continues to attach considerable importance to its participation in the Conference's work and is focusing its efforts on attaining the goals of comprehensive and complete nuclear disarmament and of enhanced transparency and predictability in this sphere.

(Mr. Malevich, Belarus)

In my statement today, I would like to inform the Conference that on 17 May 2001 the upper house of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus - the Council of the Republic - approved the Open Skies Treaty, which had been ratified on 3 May 2001 by the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus. This decision by our Parliament clearly attests to the commitment of the Republic of Belarus to unswerving compliance with its obligations in the area of international security and arms control. We hope that it will serve to promote the further strengthening of confidence and understanding among States.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish) That concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 7 June 2001, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.20 a.m.